PITTA

Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 10 October 2015

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 11th October 2015: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Located on the Vijayawada highway, the Park was started as a sanctuary for the endangered Black Buck, but it now houses considerable numbers of Cheetal. Besides, the Park usually yields good numbers of small woodland birds, ground birds like Partridges and Stone Curlew and, perhaps, even a Nightjar. Short-toed Snake Eagles are known to have nested in this park earlier. Also, with the nearby garbage yard having been relocated, there may be an improvement in the variety of bird life. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: "Waiting for the Rains": 1st part of BBC's "Wonders of the Monsoon" documentary series. Monday, 5th October 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Step into a world where life is shaped by the greatest weather system on earth!
Monsoon winds sweep across a vast region every year, turning drought to deluge and shaping the landscapes, the wildlife and the cultures. All life here, from the highest peaks of the Himalayas to the scorched red earth of Australia, is dominated by this rampaging weather system.

GEOLOGICAL BIRDING

Trip Report – Geological Survey of India, 13th September 2015

Bhamidi Srikanth

Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

On kind invitation by Dr Samuel Sukumar, a field trip was organized to the Geological Survey of India (GSI) Training Institute. Joining up with the others at our regular meeting point in Punjagutta, we proceeded to the venue. When I first heard that this month's trip was planned to GSI campus, I was really excited, as there is a lot of vegetation in the area, and I had been hearing about it for a long time.

The walk started at 6:30AM, and was attended by around 50 birders from BSAP, who were welcomed with a warm cup of tea near the hostels. The walk began with the sighting of a pair of Grasshoppers mating. Later, during the almost-6-km course of the walk, we spotted around 50 species of birds. The list included birds like Grey Francolins, Black-shouldered Kite, Shikra, Dusky Crag Martin and many other interesting species.

Shikra (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

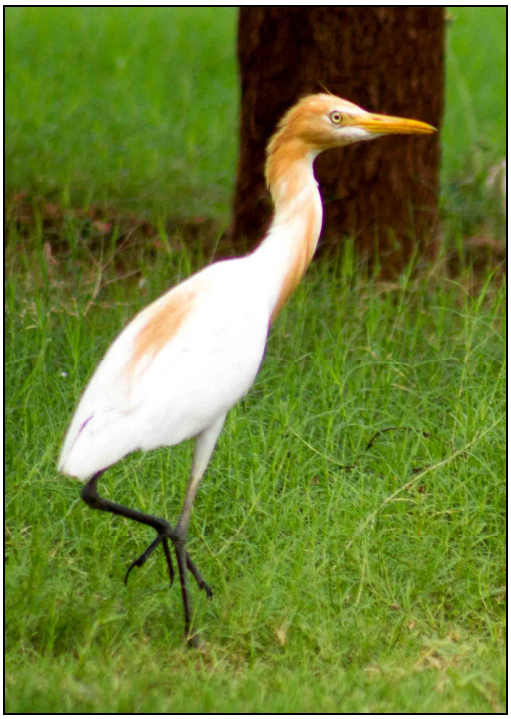
One interesting incident during the trip was the sighting of what we initially identified as a Drongo Cuckoo, with the members of the group eagerly trying to understand and describe the diagnostic features of the bird… Unfortunately, to everyone's disappointment, it finally turned out to be a juvenile Black Drongo!

Black Drongo juvenile (Photo: Bhamidi Srikanth)

There was also a visit to the museum which showcased dinosaur bones and fossils from various time periods, and also several rare rock samples which helped us understand the work that GSI does.

Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar

The most important highlight of our field trip was the fabulous breakfast organized by Dr. Sukumar, which everyone enjoyed to the fullest - heartfelt thanks to Dr Sukumar for arranging that breakfast, which was badly needed by our tired and dehydrated bodies!



Cattle Egret (Photo: Bhamidi Srikanth)

Then, of course, when the return was announced and we began compiling the list of birds, there was a little sadness that the trip had ended and we had to head back.

Birding has taught me one thing: "Whatever the difficult situation you might be in, when you view things at birds' eye view (i.e. take a broader perspective), it will always give you a solution."

The final list of sightings is given below:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
2	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*
3	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
4	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
5	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*
6	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*
7	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*
8	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
9	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
10	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
11	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*
12	Black-shouldered Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*
13	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
14	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*
15	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*
16	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*
17	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*
18	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopacea*
19	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*
20	Southern Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*
21	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*
22	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
23	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
24	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
25	Red-rumped Swallow	*Hirundo daurica*
26	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
27	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*
28	Jungle Prinia	*Prinia sylvatica*
29	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
30	Large Grey Babbler	*Turdoides malcolmi*
31	Asian Brown Flycatcher	*Muscicapa latirostris*
32	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
33	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
34	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnus pagodarum*
35	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
36	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
37	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Nectarinia zeylonica*
38	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
39	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
40	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
41	Indian Silverbill	*Lonchura malabarica*
42	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lamius vittatus*
43	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
44	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
45	Dusky Crag Martin	*Hirundo concolor*
46	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
47	Coppersmith Barbet	*Megalaima haemacephala*
48	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*

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Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)

Indian Golden Oriole Male (L) and Female (R) (Chennai, March 2015)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Oriolidae
Genus: *Oriolus*
Species: *O. kundoo*
Size: 25 cm

Description & distribution: The Indian Golden Oriole is a member of the Oriolidae family. Like the Eurasian Golden Oriole (of which it was earlier considered a sub-species), the Indian Golden Oriole is a striking golden yellow-and-black in colour. The body is predominantly golden, and it has a pale red bill and irises, and a black mask with the eye-stripe extending behind the eye - the main feature differentiating it from the Eurasian Golden Oriole, with whom it was, until recently, considered conspecific. The Indian Golden Oriole has now been elevated to a separate species, due to differences in morphology, plumage and vocalizations; the two also appear not to intergrade. The Eurasian Golden Oriole is also larger in size.

The male Indian Golden Oriole has black wings with a small golden wing patch, and wide golden-yellow tips to the secondary and tertiary feathers. The female is more greenish-yellow overall, and the underparts are streaked; the streaks are sharper than those on the female Eurasian Golden Oriole. Juvenile birds have varying colouration depending on the age, and a first-year male could be confused with a female.

The Indian Golden Oriole is distributed across a large part of Asia - from Uzbekistan, Eastern Turkmenistan, South-Eastern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, extreme Western China (Tien Shan), Baluchistan hills, and from Northern and Eastern Afghanistan eastwards to Nepal, and south through most of peninsular India. The non-breeding bird is also seen farther south in India and in Sri Lanka.

Habitat & behaviour: The Indian Golden Oriole is usually seen singly or in pairs. It inhabits a wide range of habitats, including open deciduous forests, semi-evergreen forests, woodlands, mangroves, open country with scattered trees, farmlands, paddy-fields, scrub areas, as well as parks, gardens, orchards and plantations in sub-tropical open country. It is considered a partial migrant, with the Indian population being largely resident, while the other populations are migratory. Northern populations winter in southern India and parts of Sri Lanka, while the populations seen in Maldives and the Andamans have not been properly studied.

The Indian Golden Oriole has a strong flight, dipping occasionally when covering longer distances, and is reminiscent of a thrush in flight. It has a harsh, screech-like call which doesn't seem to 'fit' the bird. The diet consists mainly of fruits, nectar and insects. They are known to disperse seeds of many plants, including the invasive *Lantana camara*.

Nesting: The Indian Golden Oriole breeds from April to August. The nest is a small cup, usually built in small forks near the end of a branch; nests are quite often placed near that of a Black Drongo. Both parents share nest-building, defence, incubation and feeding duties. The usual clutch consists of 2-3 white eggs, speckled reddish, brown and black.

Local name: The Indian Golden Oriole is known as *'peelak'* in Hindi (a name also used for the Black-naped and the Black-hooded Orioles), '*vanga pandu'* in Telugu and *'suvarna pakshi'* in Kannada.

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An Unexpected Trip to ICRISAT

Janani M

River Tern (Photo: Humayun Taher)

I had always wanted to see the ICRISAT campus, and this unexpected trip came about when my friend Prasad called me on that beautiful day around 10:00AM and asked if I wanted to come along. I immediately started with my camera and birding gear, and together we joined up with Humayun and Lawrence uncle.

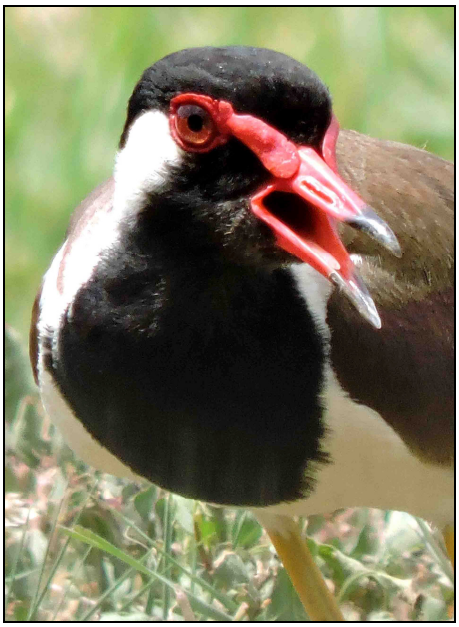
Apart from the fact that ICRISAT campus was a birding hotspot with grasslands and water bodies I did not know much more. We reached the campus by late morning and, as we were entering the campus, Lawrence uncle mentioned that in their previous visit they had spotted an Indian Courser running towards its chicks at the entrance itself. So I was curious about seeing the bird for the first time, but unfortunately this time the family was absent. The campus layout, maintenance, security and the people who live there are of remarkable standards, and it may be due to these factors that our bird friends find this such a nice place to stay.

Having registered ourselves at the office and placed our things at the MILLET 'guestel' facility, the keen observation work of our eyes began. At the first lake, we spotted a Little Cormorant perched on a pole sticking out of the water. There were also a few Cattle Egrets. At the second lake, we spotted an Indian Moorhen.

Black-crowned Night Heron (Photo: Humayun Taher)

At the third lake, while we were observing the Black-crowned Night Herons, we found a Pheasant-tailed Jacana swimming at the water's edge; it was nearly invisible as it moved around in the bushes.

Later, as we were moving towards the Patancheru Lake, Humayun mentioned that on this route there was a strong possibility of sighting the Indian Stone Curlews; sadly, we were unable to see a single bird this time. We deduced that this was due to a group of Langoors which seemed to have taken up residence in the area.



Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Janani M)

Indian Peafowl male (Photo: Janani M)

On the way, a Red-wattled Lapwing was announcing our presence to all its feathered friends. On the right side, some Indian Peafowl with their beautiful fully-grown tail feathers perched on the trees and other perches. All the way, on either side of the road, peacocks were displaying for the unconcerned peahens with the tail feathers fanned out.

Greater Flamingo (Photo: Humayun Taher)

On reaching the Patancheru Lake, we were surprised to see over a hundred majestic Greater Flamingos scattered around the lake in small flocks. It was a real surprise and wonder to see them at this time of the year as they normally should have left this place long back. They were in a feeding frenzy unmindful of our presence. There were Common Coots at the other end of this lake, Black-tailed Godwits and Eurasian Spoonbills. The lake is not very secure for them, as it is outside the ICRISAT premises, and there was also a boat moving around in the lake - probably fishermen and the local folk.

Eurasian Spoonbill (Photo: Humayun Taher)

The next lake we visited was the ICRISAT Lake. It was completely dry and there was earth-moving equipment parked in the lake bed. We presumed some dredging work was going on in the feeder streams; this had left the resident Spot-billed Pelican, which has been staying there since a very long time, with a mere puddle of water. We were very worried about it and decided to talk to the authorities about this. Later we heard that, on Humayun's request, the ICRISAT authorities relocated the bird to the Red Lake where it has settled down and is doing well.

Oriental Pratincole adult (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Oriental Pratincole juvenile (Photo: Humayun Taher)

While passing through the grasslands, we spotted some Oriental Pratincoles on the track ahead. To our delight, we could also see that there were two juveniles in the area. Soon after that, we could hear Painted Francolins calling from somewhere close by, and we settled down there for some time in the hope of seeing one. To our disappointment, though, the bird fell silent and appeared to move away - its next call came from further away.

Indian Roller (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Later, we saw several birds like the Rufous Treepie, Indian Roller, Southern Coucal, Indian Silverbill and Pied Bushchat. But then, three things stopped us as we drove forward through this area:

One was a Painted Francolin, which was flushed just beside the car track, and which disappeared into the bushes; the second was a White-eyed Buzzard perched on a distant pole; and the third was a Shikra perching on a branch very close to us, which seemed to be deep in thought.

Shikra adult (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Shikra juvenile (Photo: Humayun Taher)

The White-eyed Buzzard flew in front of us again and we tried to get a good sight of it, but it refused to sit, continuously flew around us, and finally led us to a tree where several Baya Weavers were busy weaving their iconic nests.

White-eyed Buzzard juvenile (Photo: Humayun Taher)

The climate became a bit cloudy, indicating rain. We reached another lake having a tiny island with many Large Cormorants nesting. We saw one with a strange white colouration on its head.

Large Cormorant (Photo: Humayun Taher)

We also sighted the Black-headed Ibis, several Grey Herons, a few Lesser Whistling-ducks, and many swimming Spot-billed Ducks.

Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Janani M)

A pair of Black-shouldered Kites kept moving from one place to another while I was trying to get a snap of them. Lawrence uncle tried to photograph a Zitting Cisticola in the grass, but it flew away.

Near the lake we met our host Cynthia, who seemed very excited about birding. She said that she would be joining us the next morning to see the Flamingos at the Patancheru Lake.

It was becoming dark and we started on our way back to the MILLET guest room. On the way we found a pair of Indian Thick-knees in the drizzling weather.

Indian Thick-knee (Photo: Humayun Taher)

After an excellent dinner at the canteen, we moved back to the road for some night birding. A few Black-naped Hares and an Indian Thick-knee was all we spotted, but due to security reasons we had to cut short our night trip and move back to MILLET. After preparing the day's list, we decided to take catch some much-needed sleep.

Indian Thick-knee by night (Photo: Humayun Taher)

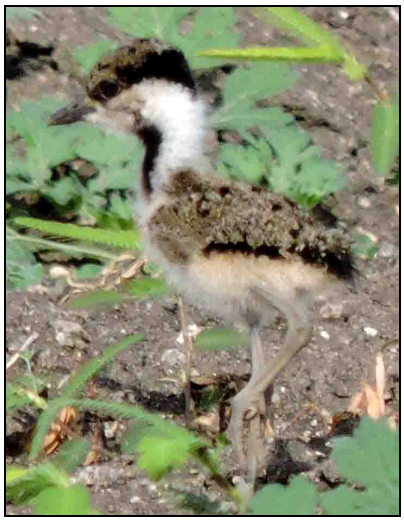
Baya Weaver (Photo: Humayun Taher)

Early morning found us back at the Patancheru Lake, where we were again greeted by the flocks of Greater Flamingos. Cynthia joined us there and captured some wonderful pink moments. We also spotted a Bronze-winged Jacana walking along the edge of the water on its elongated toes, some Baya Weavers in the reeds, and a Brahminy Kite in flight.

We moved to towards the spot where we had found the Oriental Pratincoles the previous day as Cynthia was very keen to see these. Just then, Prasad yelled 'raptor'!

First we thought it was the same White-eyed Buzzard we saw the day before but when we moved towards it, we realized it was something else. Humayun cautiously moved towards it at a slow pace and captured some shots before it flew away.

The day was heating up by now, so we started back towards the canteen to have some breakfast, being stopped on the way by the sighting of two tiny Red-wattled Lapwing chicks in a ploughed field.



Red-wattled Lapwing chick (Photo: Janani M)

Finally we reached the canteen and, as we ate our breakfast, we discussed about the raptor without being able to reach a proper consensus. (I later learnt that the raptor had been identified by other experts as a Tawny Eagle.)

Tawny Eagle (Photo: Humayun Taher)

We bid adieu to Cynthia and packed our things as we had to get back to the city. On the way out, we did one final check of the lakes, and finally bid our farewells to the campus which is protecting our bird friends.

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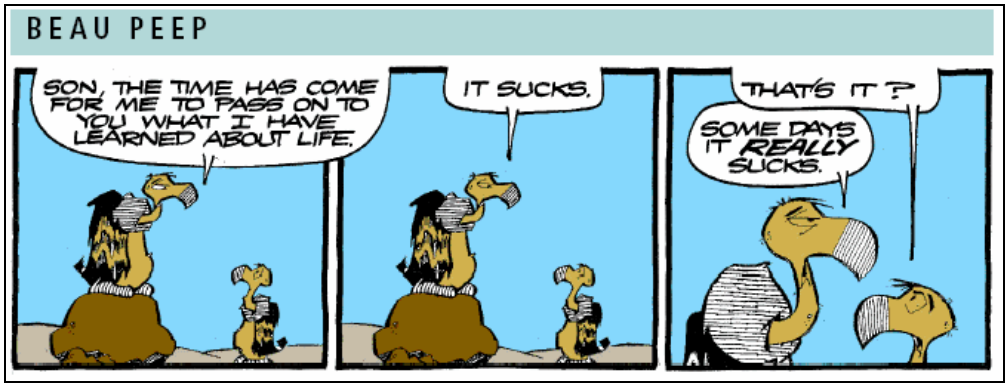
Bird Humour


BEAU PEEP
SON, THE TIME HAS COME FOR ME TO PASS ON TO YOU WHAT I HAVE LEARNED ABOUT LIFE.
IT SUCKS.
THAT'S IT ?
SOME DAYS IT REALLY SUCKS.

(From Times of India, 01-10-2012)

For Private Circulation Only
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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*